

Truckee River flood wall and levee ready for the storm

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[Tribune/Debra Reid](#) - Tokala Chasing Crow, left, inspected the new Reno-Sparks Indian Colony flood wall with her Paiute relatives including Lorri Chasing Crow, Angie Alsobrook, Jamie Stump, William and Ethan Astor and Okoye Peabody. Stump said colony residents look forward to shopping at the Walmart under construction nearby.



[Tribune/Debra Reid](#) - Christina Thomas performed a Native American flag song at Thursday's floodwall/levee celebration. The structure stands between the Truckee River and a nearby Walmart under construction at the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony.

The Truckee River Flood Project kicked off the damage control portion of its mission with the unveiling Thursday of a completed flood wall and levee near the Grand Sierra Resort.

The earthen levee and concrete flood wall each extend approximately 1,200 feet along the river's south bank, meeting at a point 100 yards up from the water. The barrier borders a chunk of land at the northeast intersection of Glendale Avenue and U.S. 395 that was one of the sites of major flooding on Jan. 1, 1997.

"This is going to be an interesting day," Washoe County Commissioner and flood project chairman Bob Larkin said Thursday as he remembered his thoughts while watching the first waters of the 1997 flood break through an overpass.

About the importance of the flood project, Larkin added "Floods have no respect for persons or places or times or occupations."

The levee and flood wall are protecting a piece of land that is split between a restitution

center operated by the Nevada Department of Corrections (DOC) and an empty plot owned by the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony. Part of the empty lot was the former home of Sierra Printing, owned by the tribe, and the other part is being developed as a Wal-Mart Supercenter.

On the first day of 1997, Larkin said before Thursday's ribbon-cutting ceremony, the land was completely under water after heavy rain and snow followed by warm weather sent a deluge flowing down the Truckee. More than \$1 billion in damage resulted to businesses in the Sparks industrial area, downtown Reno and other areas of the river. More than 800 people lost their jobs and 15,000 jobs were affected by the flood damage.

Since then, the Truckee River Flood Project was established as a joint effort by local jurisdictions, the Army Corps of Engineers and private partners to prevent such a disaster from happening again. Project director Naomi Duerr said the project's price tag is \$1.6 billion, of which approximately one-third will be paid by local sources; the rest will be paid by federal sources. The levee/flood wall that was unveiled Thursday is one of around 40 projects that comprise the entire flood control effort.

Funding and planning for the entire project encompass a web of financing, swapping and negotiating. The Nevada DOC and the Indian Colony donated sections of their land for the construction of the levee and flood wall. Under a 2005 agreement put into law by Assembly Bill 299, the Indian Colony agreed to incur \$900,000 in debt to design and build a new restitution center on colony land at Kietzke Lane and Second Street. In exchange, the tribe will receive the land at Glendale and U.S. 395 where the DOC's restitution center currently sits. Also under AB 299, the tribe agreed to donate \$600,000 per year from its Wal-Mart proceeds to the Washoe County School District.

To pay for the flood project, the county has been collecting a 1/8 percent sales tax since 1998, which so far has brought in about \$23 million.

Duerr said the annual tax revenue has declined about 20 percent the last few years in the slumping economy. However, the sales tax is only expected to pay for about \$100 million of the local share of the project. The rest will come from fees that are still being finalized. However, Duerr said that the fee might involve two levels depending on whether a business or residence is located in the flood plain or simply benefits from the damage prevented by the project.

"The average resident not in the flood plain might pay what Sparks residents already pay," Duerr said, referring to the \$5.41 paid by Sparks residents on their monthly sewer bill for the North Truckee Drain part of the project. Those located in the flood plain might pay around \$10 or \$15 per month, she said, though she "definitely expects" the fees to be offset by reductions in flood insurance rates resulting from the decreased risk of flooding the project produces.

Any fee imposed to pay for the flood project would be finalized by the flood management authority, an entity that was created by the Legislature in its 2009 session. The authority,

which Duerr compared to the Truckee Meadows Water Authority in its ability to set rates and manage a specific resource, will likely be formed from the current flood project board of directors.

Money for various projects will also come from private partners. Wal-Mart, for example, donated \$2 million toward the levee and flood wall that will protect its new store. Groundbreaking on the store will likely take place in the next month or two with a six- to 12-month construction period to follow. Upon completion, the Wal-Mart store on North McCarran Boulevard at U.S. 395 will close. The new store will absorb many of the old store's 250 employees and take on around 250 more, according to Wal-Mart's northern Nevada market manager Dacona Smith.

Many of the flood plan's specific projects are still in the planning process while a few are about to begin. Groundbreaking on habitat restoration at the Lower Mustang Ranch area east of Sparks is expected to take place early next year, as is the grand opening of the Lockwood habitat restoration project.

"We are very pleased that this is the first part of this project with many more on its heels," Duerr said.